



CAROLINA CONNECTIONS

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SPRING 2013

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Help Plan the Forests' Future

Revision of the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forests Management Plan (the Plan) continues. This is the time when local leaders and residents, recreationists and many others can provide input on how the Nantahala and Pisgah national forests are managed.

The Forest Service is in the first phase, called the [Assessment Phase](#), of Plan revision. During this phase, the agency is collecting and compiling information on the current conditions across the Nantahala and Pisgah national forests. The assessment phase will help determine what changes are needed to the management plan for the two national forests.

During the Assessment Phase, the Forest Service is collecting information on the following 15 elements:

- Terrestrial ecosystems, aquatic ecosystems and watersheds.

- Air, soil and water resources and quality.
- System drivers, including dominant ecological processes, disturbance regimes, and stressors, such as natural succession, wildland fire, invasive species, and climate change, and the ability of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems on the plan area to adapt to change.
- Baseline assessment of carbon stocks.
- Threatened, endangered, proposed and candidate species, and potential species of conservation concern present in the plan area.
- Social, cultural and economic conditions.
- Benefits people obtain from the National Forest System planning area.

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Restoring Mountain Forests with Fire

In the spring, the Forest Service conducts [prescribed burns](#) in parts of the Nantahala and Pisgah national forests.

Purposely burning the forest may seem strange to some. However, prescribed burning is an important tool used by the Forest Service to maintain and enhance forest health.



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Just five months after a prescribed burn, a part of Pisgah National Forest is greening up with new sprouts.

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Spring at a Coastal Forest

This spring, visitors are in for a treat at the Croatan National Forest, with new trails and open camp grounds. The 160,000-acre coastal forest offers an abundance of outdoor adventures.

The Croatan National Forest includes pine forests, saltwater estuaries, bogs and raised swamps called pocosins. Bordered on three sides by tidal rivers and the Bogue Sound, the forest is defined by water.

This ecosystem includes diverse wildlife species from deer, black bears and turkeys to wading birds, Red-cockaded woodpeckers and alligators. The Bachman's sparrow, the Carolina gopher frog, perhaps one of the rarest amphibians in the state, and a native Venus flytrap plant population also call the Croatan home.

Croatan National Forest offers a variety of long and short-distance trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding and motoring on an all-terrain vehicle. Sleep under the stars in a variety of developed campgrounds and dispersed campsites.

Red-cockaded woodpecker

Spring is typically when plants are blooming and many species are moving about as breeding season gets in full swing. The population of Red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCW) increases. Most chicks are banded in May as part of restoration efforts.

In the coastal plain, the endangered RCW relies mainly on longleaf pine trees because of the prevalence of red-heart fungus, also known as heart rot, which makes it easier for the woodpeckers to make cavities in the trees.



While at the Croatan National Forest, visitors might see a Red-cockaded woodpecker flying to or from a cavity like this one in a longleaf pine tree. Inside the tree, a nest may hold three eggs.

RCWs are also thought to prefer longleaf pine because they are especially sappy. The woodpeckers drill wells around the cavity entrance to get sap flowing. This sticky sap helps to guard against predators, keeping unwanted snakes away from their nests. The Croatan has an extensive amount of longleaf pine forests with grassy understories that support RCWs. The Forest Service is working with a wide variety of partners on increasing longleaf pine forests and RCW populations.

Prescribed Burning

The Forest Service conducts prescribed burns in the spring at the Croatan National Forest. Prescribed burning helps to re-establish longleaf pine trees, a fire-adapted forest ecosystem that the Forest Service and other agencies are working to restore across the South. Prescribed burning also reduces woody debris on the forest floor, which helps prevent catastrophic wildfire, protecting neighbors and public infrastructure. The safety of the public and firefighters is the number one priority during every prescribed burn.

Cheoah Ranger District

The Cheoah offers a number of dispersed campsites for folks who want a more primitive camping experience. If visitors are looking for more amenities, most of Cheoah's developed campgrounds, including Cheoah Point Campground near Lake Santeetlah, open on April 1. When camping, practice "Leave No Trace" and remember to extinguish any campfires before leaving a site. Help prevent wildfires.

Spring is also a good time to hike portions of the Appalachian Trail. More than a dozen miles of the Trail meander

through the western part of the Cheoah Ranger District.

While hiking the Trail or other parts of the district this spring, visitors might be lucky enough to see a golden-winged warbler. The Forest Service is partnering with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission to increase habitat for this neotropical songbird whose numbers have declined over the years.

Fishing on Lake Santeetlah, a jewel in the crown of western North Carolina, is another popular spring activity. Smallmouth bass, largemouth bass and walleye are among the most common species in this scenic lake.

Nantahala Ranger District

The Forest Service reopened popular Dry Falls after making extensive repairs. Significant improvements were made to the historic and scenic trail in the Nantahala National Forest, providing visitors with a more enjoyable experience.

"Restoration of the trail promotes public safety, while maintaining and preserving the historic integrity of the popular recreation area," said Mike Wilkins, Nantahala District ranger.



The \$466,000 project stabilized the trail, reconstructed and replaced the entire walking

path and removed tripping hazards. The project also protects water quality through drainage control measures. The improvements enhance the visual appeal of the trail and make it easier to maintain.

The Civilian Conservation Corps constructed the original trail in the first half of the 20th Century. Dry Falls is located northwest of the town of Highlands, N.C., off of Hwy 28.

Tusquitee Ranger District

In the spring, the Tusquitee Ranger District is the place to enjoy the beauty of the backcountry.

Dispersed campsites along Hiwassee Lake, Buck Creek, Fires Creek and Beech Creek offer visitors a variety of more primitive camping opportunities. Be advised that many of the access roads to the popular [Fires Creek Backcountry Area](#) will be closed for an indefinite period of time due to storm-related road

damages.

Spring is also a good time to hike or bike the Jackrabbit Trails system. There are 15 miles of trails located a half-mile from the Jackrabbit campsites. Anglers can head to Chatuge Lake and fish for a number of species.

Shooters can hone their skills at the Panther Top shooting range. The facility is open year-round. The 100-yard range accommodates pistols and rifles. The cost to use the facility is \$2 a day or \$25 for a season pass.

Appalachian Ranger District

The new, environmentally friendly Appalachian Ranger District office at 632 Manor Road, Mars Hill, N.C., 28754, [opened to the public last fall](#). The Forest Service designed the facility to meet standards required by the United States Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program.



"The district office exemplifies the Forest Service's effort to enhance the agency's operations by improving the design of newly constructed buildings," said Kristin Bail, supervisor of the National Forests in North Carolina.

At the new office, visitors can, among other things, acquire a permit for [ramp harvesting](#), a popular springtime activity in the Pisgah National Forest. The spring plant typically only lasts above ground from late March through mid-May, fading with the onset of warm weather.

Grandfather Ranger District

Most visitors to the Grandfather Ranger District aren't interested in parking lots. But if a parking lot leads to a scenic waterfall, interest in a paved area may increase.



Such is the case with the new parking lot near Catawba Falls. Last spring, the Forest Service [completed construction](#) of the parking area that gives visitors easier access to the beautiful waterway.

Visitors can now leave their vehicles at the parking lot, located off Catawba River Road in Old Fort, N.C., and make the short walk to Catawba Falls. The parking lot holds approximately 30 cars.

Pisgah Ranger District

The Cradle of Forestry is a must-see when visiting the Pisgah Ranger District in the spring. The Cradle opens April 13. Located off US 276, it spans a century of forest conservation and offers a glimpse of life at America's first school of forestry along the Biltmore Campus Trail. Relax and walk along the newly constructed 1.3-mile Forest Discovery Trail. Learn more about forestry in America by visiting the Forest Discovery Center. The Cradle of Forestry offers a number of events in the spring that the whole family will enjoy. For more information, visit:

www.cradleofforestry.com.

Looking for a place to camp this spring? The Sunburst Campground and adjacent day-use area offer picnic areas as well as fishing, hiking and more, without the crowds of more popular areas. For large groups, the Kuykendall Group Campground supports up to 60 campers, providing facilities as well as fishing and hiking opportunities.

Be bear aware while camping this season. Visit the National Forests in North Carolina website, www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc, for a list of bear safety tips and practices.

Spring at the Uwharrie

Spring visitors to the Uwharrie National Forest will find 51,000 acres that offer recreation opportunities and natural resources, including clean rivers and streams, diverse vegetation, scenery, wildlife habitat and wood products.

The national forest is operating under a [new management plan](#) that was issued last year. Some of the highlights include improving diversity and habitats for species such as the endangered Schweinitz's sunflower through increased use of prescribed fire. Prescribed fire is critical for restoration and maintenance of longleaf pine forests. The Plan also establishes a goal for designating trails for equestrian and mountain bike use and then restricting those uses to the designated trails. This will promote forest health by reducing erosion and impacts to rare species and archeological sites.

Wood Run Mountain Bike Trail

The [Wood Run Mountain Bike Trail](#) provides a scenic experience in North Carolina's Piedmont. The paths cross high, rocky ridges dotted with pine, scarlet and chestnut oak. Maples, tulip poplars and beach trees line the creeks. Adding blooms of color in the spring are mountain laurel, dogwoods, azalea and red buds.

A big draw for visitors is the area's streams and wildlife. Look out for deer and wild turkey in this area. Wood Run, Little Island Creek, Dutchman's Creek, and Cattail and Panther's Branches are some waterways to discover. When crossing streams, please tread lightly and stay on the trail to prevent erosion. Cyclists may need to carry their bikes across the creeks depending on stream flow.

Uwharrie National Recreation Trail

The Uwharrie National Recreational Trail offers various scenic areas,

streams and rocky terrain. The 20-mile trail can be hiked in long or short sections and in loops as the trail crosses several access points. Marked with white blazes, the trail is excellent for long distance backpacking and dispersed camping.

Badin Lake Recreation Area: Arrowhead Campground

Arrowhead Campground offers 33 campsites with electrical hookups and 15 without electricity. There is an accessible paved path through the campground. This campground has one centrally located bathhouse with showers and flush toilets. Each site has a picnic table, grill, fire ring and a lantern post. This campground has a dump station, drinking water and is perfect for camping in a tent, camper trailer or RV. This campground is the closest to the Cove Boat Launch for access to Badin Lake.

Badin Lake Campground

Open year-round, the Badin Lake Campground offers 34 sites for tent or RV camping. Each site has a picnic table, grill, fire ring, lantern post and tend pad. With drinking water and hot showers, the campground is suited well for tent, camper trailer or RV. There are several campsites directly on Badin Lake's shoreline.

Canebrake Horse Camp

Offering 40 miles of nearby horse trails, Canebrake Horse Camp is a great getaway for equestrians who like to ride and camp. The camp has 28 sites with parking spurs for trailers. Equestrians can ride from the campground to the trails on the forest. Each site has a picnic table, grill, fire ring, tables, lantern and highline posts. Up to two vehicles are allowed at each campsite. Open year-round, Canebrake Horse Camp offers drinking water, showers and flush toilets. Additionally, there is a dump station and a horse washing station. All sites are electric.

For reservations, call 877-444-6777 or visit www.recreation.gov.

UWHARRIE NATIONAL FOREST

NATIONAL FORESTS in NORTH CAROLINA

160A Zillicoa St.
Asheville, N.C.
28801

Phone: 828-257-4200
Fax: 828-257-4263

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www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc



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and serving people.*

Staff writers:

- Amarra Ghani, media specialist
- Tim Vander Horst, web manager
- Stevin Westcott, public affairs officer



Help Plan the Forests' Future *(cont'd from page 1)*

- Multiple uses and their contributions to local, regional and national economies.
- Recreation settings, opportunities and access, and scenic character.
- Renewable and nonrenewable energy and mineral resources.
- Infrastructure, such as recreational facilities and transportation and utility corridors.
- Areas of tribal importance.
- Cultural and historic resources and uses.
- Land status and ownership, use and access patterns.
- Existing designated areas located in the plan area including wilderness and wild and scenic rivers and po-

tential need and opportunity for additional designated areas.

The Assessment Phase began last fall and will continue until fall 2013. Public meetings have been held this winter. Additional meetings will be announced and listed on the Plan revision webpage: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/nfsnc/nprevision.

Comments or questions about the Plan revision or process can be sent by email to: comments-southern-north-carolina@fs.fed.us. Hard copies of comments can be mailed to:

National Forests in North Carolina
Nantahala-Pisgah Plan Revision
160A Zillicoa St.
Asheville, NC 28801

Restoring Mountain Forests with Fire *(cont'd from page 1)*

"Fire has been part of Southern Appalachian forests for thousands of years, and we've learned that putting out every fire creates a buildup of forest debris, putting communities at risk and threatening forest health," said Kristin Bail, supervisor of the National Forests in North Carolina.

Low- to medium-intensity prescribed burns can reduce the frequency of destructive fires that could threaten communities. Also, prescribed burns restore native trees and plants. Fire creates habitats that provide important food sources such as sprouts, acorns and berries for wildlife. In addition, prescribed burns can reduce certain forest pests and non-native plants.

In 2013, the Forest Service plans to conduct prescribed burns on 8,000 to 10,000 acres in the Nantahala and Pis-

gah national forests.

"Safety is the top priority of our prescribed burning program," said Bail. "We take the safety of neighbors and the health of our forests very seriously."



Fire Management Officer Riva Duncan talks with firefighters during a prescribed burn.

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